

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5142

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

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AMCONGEN JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 0119

EO 11652: GDS

AGS: PFOR IS LE SY

SUBJECT: CONTINUING ISRAELI INTEREST IN LEBANESE-SYRIAN
CONSULTATIONS

REF: A. TEL AVIV 0057 B. DAO 0041 DTG 071758Z

1. SUMMARY: DEFMIN PERES IN KNESSET JANUARY 6 CLEARLY
EXPRESSED GOI CONCERN AT POSSIBILITY OF SYRIAN FORCES ENTERING
LEBANON. ISRAELI PRESS OVER PAST FEW DAYS ALSO REFLECTS
FACT THAT GOI IS PAYING CLOSE ATTENTION TO PROSPECT OF
SYRIAN MILITARY ASSISTANCE BEING ACCEPTED BY GOL. ISSUE IS
ALSO OF CONCERN TO SETTLERS IN NORTHERN ISRAEL, WHO HAVE
REPORTEDLY BEEN IN CONTACT WITH GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. DEFMIN PERES JANUARY 6, SPEAKING IN KNESSET DAY BEFORE ARRIVAL
OF SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASAD IN LEBANON, HINTED AT POSSIBLE GRAVE
CONSEQUENCES OF ENTRY OF SYRIAN FORCES INTO LEBANON. HE
STOPPED SHORT HOWEVER, OF DECLARING THAT ISRAEL WOULD REGARD
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SUCH DEVELOPMENT AS CAUSA BELLI (ALTHOUGH THIS IS POSSIBLE IMPLICATION

HIS REMARKS). PERES ALSO REVEALED THAT A PLA UNIT HAD ALREADY ENTERED LEBANON FROM SYRIA, EQUIPPED WITH ANTI-TANK AND ANTI-AIRCRAFT WEAPONS. DEFMIN SAID THE UNIT WAS DEPLOYED AMONG TERRORIST CONCENTRATIONS IN BEIRUT AREA AND IN SOUTHERN LEBANON."

3. PERES RECALLED THAT WHEN JORDAN HAD BEEN THREATENED BY TERRORISTS ON ITS SOIL AND BY PROSPECT OF SYRIAN INTERVENTION JORDAN HAD CONFRONTED SITUATION AND SAVED ITSELF. HE ADDED THAT ISRAEL WOULD NOT OFFER LEBANON "ADVICE", BUT THAT LATTER SHOULD "DRAW THE REQUIRED CONCLUSIONS." WHILE STATING THAT ISRAEL HAD NO DESIGNS ON LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY OR INDEPENDENCE, PERES EMPHASIZED THAT IDF WOULD NOT ALLOW VIOLATION OF ISRAELI BORDERS NOR ALLOW ISRAELI VILLAGES AND INHABITANTS TO BECOME TARGETS FOR "TERRORISTS OR FOREIGN ARMIES."

4. MAARIV MILITARY REPORTER WRITES IN FRONT-PAGE STORY JANUARY 5 THAT "ISRAEL WILL REGARD THE ENTRY OF THE SYRIAN ARMY INTO SOUTH LEBANON AS A VIOLATION OF THE SEPARATION AGREEMENT," BECAUSE THIS WOULD WIDEN THE CONFRONTATION LINE BETWEEN IDF AND THE SYRIAN ARMY. MAARIV ADDS THAT THERE ARE STILL NO REPORTS OF SYRIAN UNITS MOVING INTO LEBANON, BUT SENIOR OFFICIAL CIRCLES NOTE AS POSSIBLE PRECEDENT THAT IN 1970 SYRIA TRANSFERRED TO LEBANON PALESTINIAN UNITS UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE SYRIAN ARMY.

5. HAARETZ MILITARY CORRESPONDENT QUOTES IDF SOURCES AS SAYING THAT ISRAEL IS FOLLOWING LEBANESE-SYRIAN SITUATION VERY CLOSELY. THOSE SOURCES REPORTEDLY BELIEVE THAT ENTRY OF SYRIAN UNITS INTO LEBANON, EVEN IF CAMOUFLAGED AS PALESTINIANS, WOULD ALTER THE DELICATE BALANCE IN THE AREA. IT WOULD BE VIEWED AS HAVING SIGNIFICANCE BEYOND THE CONTEXT OF TERRORIST ACTIVITY. FROM A MILITARY POINT OF VIEW IT WOULD MEAN SYRIAN CONTROL OVER MORE CONVENIENT ACCESS ROUTES IN THE NORTH OF ISRAEL AND WOULD BE VIEWED AS AN ATTEMPT TO OUTFLANK PRESENT ISRAELI POSITIONS. HAARETZ ARTICLE SAYS IT IS CLEAR THAT ISRAEL COULD NOT REGARD THIS DEVELOPMENT WITH INDIFFERENCE.

6. DAVAR MILITARY REPORTER ALSO WRITES THAT GOI EXPECTS
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HEAVY SYRIAN PRESSURE WILL BE EXERTED ON LEBANON TO ALLOW ENTRY OF PALESTINIAN UNITS INTO LEBANON AND ADDS THERE IS "ALMOST NO DOUBT" THAT ISRAEL WOULD REACT VERY STRONGLY TO SUCH DEVELOPMENT.

7. IN SECOND AND RELATED FRONT-PAGE ITEM, MAARIV REPORTS THAT REPRESENTATIVES OF SETTLEMENTS ON THE LEBANESE BORDER

HAVE RECENTLY CONTACTED GOI OFFICIALS TO DISCUSS POSSIBILITY OF SYRIAN REGULAR ARMY UNITS ENTERING LEBANON AND PARTICIPATING IN BORDER INCIDENTS. THESE CONTACTS WERE HELD IN VIEW OF REPORTS THAT PALESTINIAN ARMY UNITS HAVE ALREADY ENTERED LEBANON (ALTHOUGH THEY ARE NOT NEAR THE BORDER), AND DUE TO THE POSSIBILITY THAT GOL MIGHT AGREE TO FURTHER SYRIAN REQUESTS TO STATION TROOPS ON ITS TERRITORY. UNITS OF THE PALESTINIAN LIBERATION ARMY ATTACHED TO SYRIAN FORCES ARE REPORTEDLY EQUIPPED WITH ARTILLERY WEAPONS. ACCORDING TO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SETTLEMENTS, MAJOR ESCALATION MIGHT OCCUR IF SYRIAN REGULAR UNITS ENTER LEBANON. SEVERAL OF THE REPRESENTATIVES WENT SO FAR AS TO DEMAND THAT THE GOVERNMENT PUBLICLY DECLARE THAT IT WOULD REGARD THE ENTRY OF SYRIAN ARMY UNITS INTO LEBANON AS CAUSE FOR

WAR.

8. DAVAR EDITOR HANNA ZEMER IN THOUGHTFUL ARTICLE JANUARY 6 HAS POINTED OUT THAT GOI SEEMS TO EQUATE CURRENT SITUATION ON LEBANESE BORDER WITH SITUATION IN JORDAN VALLEY DURING 1960S, AND THEREFORE REACTS TO IT IN SIMILAR FASHION, I.E. WITH VIOLENT REPRISAL RAIDS. ZEMER CLAIMS, HOWEVER, THAT TWO SITUATIONS ARE VERY DIFFERENT AND THAT PRESENT POLICY IN LEBANON COULD IN LONG RUN LEAD TO RESULTS CONTRARY TO INTERESTS OF ISRAEL. SPECIFICALLY, CONSTANT MILITARY PRESSURE COULD LEAD TO CHANGE IN INTERNAL LEBANESE POLITICAL EQUATION WITH RESULT OF LEADING LEBANON INTO CAMP OF ARAB EXTREMISTS BUT WITHOUT SIGNIFICANTLY SUPPRESSING TERRORISM. ZEMER CLAIMS THAT SIMILAR OPINIONS ARE EXPRESSED IN CLOSED COUNCILS OF GOVERNMENT, BUT THAT ISRAELI INTERESTS WOULD BE SERVED BY MAKING THEM KNOWN IN PUBLIC.

9. COMMENT: PERES STATEMENT EXPRESSES GRAVE ISRAELI CONCERN OVER WHAT MIGHT DEVELOP AS RESULT OF ASAD-FRANGIEH DISCUSSIONS WHILE STILL LEAVING ALL GOI OPTIONS OPEN. HIS STATEMENT, CONFIDENTIAL

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TOGETHER WITH OBVIOUS IDF "BACKGROUNDERS" TO PRESS, LEAVE LITTLE DOUBT THAT GOI WOULD CONSIDER OVERT SYRIAN INTERVENTION IN LEBANON AS CONSTITUTING NEW AND DANGEROUS SITUATION. PERES MENTION OF PLA UNITS ALREADY IN LEBANON COULD ALSO BE USED TO JUSTIFY FURTHER HEAVY STRIKES AGAINST WHAT IDF CONSIDERS TERRORIST CONCENTRATIONS. PERES' REMARKS ALSO CLEARLY HINT THAT GOI MIGHT CONSIDER SIGNIFICANT INCREASE OF "FOREIGN" TROOPS IN SOUTHERN LEBANON AS CASUS BELLI. WE AGREE WITH OUR DATT ASSESSMENT (REF B), HOWEVER, THAT LARGE-SCALE GROUND OPERATION AGAINST SOUTHERN LEBANON IS NOT IN OFFING UNLESS SYRIANS INTERVENE IN FORCE. KEATING

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